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ABSTRACT

Compiled using data from the American Library Association's Office of Intellectual Freedom (OIF), this report provides information about censorship attempts and actions in Michigan between 1976 and 1980. From 1966 through 1975, 65 cases of censorship were reported; from 1975 through 1980, 23 cases were reported. It is noted that an estimated 85% of censorship incidents are never reported to the OIF; therefore, Michigan's actual censorship rate could be significantly higher. The number of censorship attempts in Michigan was found to be considerably below the national average. Censorship cases were reported in 20 cities and in both educational and noneducational institutions. Attacks on educational institutions were widespread throughout the state, but attacks on noneducational institutions were mostly in the Detroit vicinity. In educational institutions, censorship cases were most often initiated by parents; in noneducational settings cases were initiated by a variety of figures, including attorneys and religious groups. The most commonly cited complaints were that materials were offensive, sexually explicit, or promoted stereotypes. Educational institutions were the most affected, with two attempts in elementary schools, one in a junior high school, 10 in high schools, and three in colleges and universities. Other entities affected included political leaflets (1), the press (1), stores (3), television stations (1), and theaters (1). Of the 23 cases, 13 were successful, four were partially successful, two were unsuccessful, and four were of unknown status. Seven tables summarize the findings. (17 references) (SD)

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Sex and Violence in Michigan

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The threat of censorship continues to plague Michigan, as at least twenty-three attacks were recorded by ALA's Office of Intellectual Freedom (OIF) during the past five years (1976-80) (1). This figure can be compared to a previous account of censorship from 1966 to 1975 during which sixty-five attacks were registered (2). This study is limited to those attacks recorded in the Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom published by the OIF. It should be noted that many censorship incidents (about eighty-five percent nationally) are not reported in newspapers, and some that are reported are not forwarded to the OIF. So, Michigan's actual censorship rate could be much higher than the twenty-three recorded cases discussed here.

To compile this study, "Indexes of Censorship" were done for each state by dividing the ratio of the state's citations in the Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom during the five year period by the ratio of its population. In Michigan, twenty-three cases were reported out of the national total of 857 (2.7 percent). The population for 1979 was 9,207,000 or 4.2 percent of the national total (3). By dividing 2.7 percent by 4.2 percent, a censorship index of 0.64 was obtained, compared with the national average index of 1.00. This means that Michigan's censorship index for the period was considerably below the national average, and about the same as it was when the previous ten year study was reported (0.67).

The number of censorship cases in Michigan are recorded by year in Table I.

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TABLE I

Number of Censorship Cases Reported, 1976-80

Educational Institutions		Non-educational Institutions	
1976	0	1976	2
1977	5	1977	2
1978	4	1978	1
1979	4	1979	1
1980	<u>3</u>	1980	<u>1</u>
Total: 16		Total: 7	

It is of interest to note that in 1976 no attacks were reported against educational institutions. Since that is the only year in the past fifteen that this occurred, it may simply mean intellectual freedom forces were lax in reporting attempts. Also of interest is that attacks on non-educational institutions average a little less than half the attacks of educational institutions. Nationally, more than half of all attacks are made on non-educational institutions, again intimating that Michigan librarians may not be reporting cases unless they are directly affected.

In Table II, places of censorship attacks are recorded.

TABLE II

Places of Attacks, 1976-80

Educational Institutions		Non-educational Institutions	
Brighton	1	Detroit	1
East Lansing	1	Ferndale	1
Flint	1	Flint	1
Grand Blanc	2	Lansing	1
Grand Rapids	1	Mancomb County	1
Hesperia	1	Saginaw	1
Holland	1	Troy	1
Manton	1		
Middleville	1		
Midland	2		
Romeo	2		
Watervliet	1		
Wyoming	1		

Attacks on educational institutions were widespread throughout the state, but attacks on non-educational institutions were mostly in the vicinity of Detroit. This large city is conspicuous by its absence under educational institutions, however, and only one attack, on WKBD-TV was reported from there (4). This is quite a change from the previous study in which Detroit had nine cases and Lansing had six (2). In this study, Lansing reported one case. No locality reported more than two incidents during the five years studied.

Censorship attempts come from every conceivable source. Nationally, parents often institute cases against educational institutions, with administrators and boards of education also playing significant roles. In non-educational examples it is often local prosecutors who begin cases. Table III indicates this is true for Michigan as well.

TABLE III
Sources of Attempts, 1976-80

Educational Institutions		Non-educational Institutions	
Administration		Attorneys/Courts	5
College & University	1	Community groups	2
Grades K-12	3	Customers	2
Boards of education	3	Local officials	1
Community groups	2	Police	2
Companies and businesses	2	Others	2
Librarians	1		
Parents	8		
Religious leaders and groups	5		

Community groups, police, and store customers all began censorship attempts for a variety of reasons. An increasing number of attacks were begun by religious leaders and groups, which is probably a good forecast of the type of cases that can be expected in the future due to increasing censorship activities by the national New Right movement, including the

Moral Majority.

Various reasons for censorship are cited by censors. The main reason aimed at educational institutions was that the material in question was "offensive". Reasons behind the attacks on non-educational institutions ranged from violence to perversion.

TABLE IV

Reasons for Attacks, 1976-80

Educational Institutions		Non-educational Institutions	
Anti-Semitic	1	Language	1
Content	2	Murder trial	1
Immoral	1	Perversion	1
Language	2	Political	1
Offensive	3	Stereotyped Negroes	1
Pornographic	1	Violence	1
Portrays Santa Claus as having a negative attitude about Christmas	1	No reason given	1
Sexually explicit	2		
Stereotyped Negroes	1		
Violation of sex educa- tion laws	1		
Violence	1		

In educational institutions the reasons for censorship attacks were more varied. An attack was made on Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice in Midland for being anti-Semitic and offensive to Jews (5); The Lottery, a film version of Shirley Jackson's short story, was attacked in Romeo because of its violence (6); and the nation's most frequently censored book, The Catcher in the Rye, was cited in Middleville for being immoral and "violating the word of God" (7).

From non-educational institutions, Tarzan movies and the frequently censored magazines Playboy, Penthouse, and Hustler came under attack. The Tarzan movies projected "unrealistic and negative images of Africa and African people" (4). Charges against the magazines were the usual

nudism, sexual explicitness, and content.

Educational institutions most affected were high schools, with the number of assaults at this level far outdistancing any other institution in either category. Nationally, high schools are by far the most censored level in educational institutions. Public librarians, if pleased to see that their institutions were not among those reporting attacks, no doubt have their heads below water, and are simply not reporting attacks. Keeping censorship quiet is probably not the best plan of action for public librarians, but this subject should be the topic of an entire study, and space does not permit addressing the issue here. Table V lists the institutions affected by censorship attacks.

TABLE V

Institutions Affected, 1976-80

Educational Institutions		Non-educational Institutions	
Elementary schools	2	Political leaflets	1
Junior high schools	1	Press	1
High schools	10	Stores	3
Colleges & universities	3	Television station	1
		Theater	1

Attacks at the high school level include that made on a group of sex education books in Brighton on the grounds they violated "state sex education laws which prohibits the instruction and dispensing of birth control information through the public schools" (8). The book Saturday Night Fever was removed from the library of Rogers High School in Wyoming because it contained "four-letter words and was repulsive" (9).

In higher education, the attacks were focused on a speaker, a student newspaper, and a film. The Dow Chemical Company suspended direct grants

to Central Michigan University as the result of a speech made by Jane Fonda in which she accused Dow of manipulating the tax laws to avoid paying their fair share (10). The State News, a student newspaper of Michigan State University, was charged by Tom Wilson, the creator of "Ziggy", the Universal Press Syndicate, and a campus women's group with using the popular cartoon to "sell porn flicks". This was a successful attempt in that the newspaper agreed to stop using the strip for that purpose (11). A Clockwork Orange came under attack at Calvin College in Grand Rapids for being "offensive and futuristic" (12).

The Anarchist Cookbook was attacked in Saginaw (13) while Steve Martin's A Wild and Crazy Guy album was removed from distribution in the K-Mart store in Troy and all other K-Marts throughout the United States due to complaints about language (14). A listing of materials under attack is given in Table VI.

TABLE VI
Materials Under Attack, 1976-80

Educational Institutions	Non-educational Institutions
Books:	Books:
<u>Call Me Charley</u>	<u>The Anarchist Cookbook</u>
<u>The Catcher in the Rye</u>	Magazines:
<u>Father Christmas</u>	<u>Hustler</u> ; <u>Oui</u> ; <u>Penthouse</u> ;
<u>Forever</u>	<u>Playboy</u> ; etc.
<u>Of Mice and Men</u>	Newspapers:
<u>Saturday Night Fever</u>	<u>Traverse City Record Eagle</u>
Sex education books	Movies:
Magazines:	Tarzan movies
<u>Car and Driver</u>	<u>In the Realm of the Senses</u>
<u>Psychology Today</u>	Others:
Movies:	Political leaflets
<u>A Clockwork Orange</u>	<u>A Wild and Crazy Guy</u> (recording)
<u>The Lottery</u>	
Newspaper:	
<u>The State News</u> (student)	
Plays:	
<u>The Merchant of Venice</u>	
Group of one act plays	
Speaker:	
Jane Fonda	

Table VI does not attempt to list all materials that were censored, but can serve as an illustration of what is being censored in Michigan. Several books have appeared on national lists such as The Catcher in the Rye and Of Mice and Men (15). Father Christmas appears on a national list of children's materials censored (16:45) along with The Lottery (movie) (16:86), and Forever (as well as other works) by children's author Judy Blume, one of today's most controversial authors for children and young adults.

Most objections were of a routine nature, but some were unusual. An objection was made to Father Christmas in Holland for portraying Santa Claus as having a negative attitude toward Christmas, since he complained about bad weather and difficulties in delivering gifts. The book was removed from all classrooms of the West Ottawa elementary schools (17). In Manton, the high school librarian cancelled their subscription to Car and Driver Magazine because of an article which criticized the federally mandated fifty-five mile per hour speed limit (18). No particularly unusual cases occurred in non-educational institutions.

More attempts were successful than unsuccessful in Michigan (in keeping with national figures). Successful attempts were defined as those that succeeded in banning materials or having fines levied. Partially successful attempts succeeded in having restrictions placed on materials. Cases that were recorded as unknown were because the results had not yet been recorded in the Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom. Only two cases were unsuccessful; i.e. censors failed in their attempts. Table VII gives dispositions of attacks.

TABLE VII

Disposition of Attacks, 1976-80

Educational Institutions		Non-educational Institutions	
Successful	9	Successful	4
Partially Successful	3	Partially Successful	1
Unsuccessful	1	Unsuccessful	1
Unknown	3	Unknown	1

In comparing this study to the results of the previous study done for 1966-75 (2), there:

1. Continues to be more attacks on educational institutions than non-educational, and
2. cases affecting educational institutions continue to be spread throughout the state.
3. Parents and boards of education continue to be the chief proponents of censorship attempts directed at educational institutions, but there has been a sharp upswing in attacks by religious leaders and groups.
4. For non-educational institutions, more attacks are now led by attorneys and fought in courts than previously.
5. Many of the reasons for attempts remain basically the same.
6. Among educational institutions high schools still lead in cases with stores now leading among non-educational institutions. This differs from the previous study in which theaters led by a wide margin.
7. Few repeaters were found from Michigan's previously lengthy list of materials under attack. Only The Cather in the Rye; The Lottery; A Clockwork Orange; and the magazines Oui, Penthouse, and Playboy appear on the lists in both studies.
8. As before, more reported attempts were successful than unsuccessful.

This last result (number 8) is primarily because educators, including librarians, are afraid to fight censorship battles. Nationally, when not fought, censorship attempts are more likely to be successful; when fought, community and professional support for the beleaguered educator/librarian is more likely to materialize, and these cases more often result in defeat for the censor. It must be remembered that a censor

looking for something to censor need only look through a library collection or a class reading list. No collection can be so "sanitized" as to be immune. Therefore, it behooves educators to take a strong stand against censorship to preserve intellectual freedom as well as their rights to teach pertinent subject materials or stock them on library shelves. With the New Right now moving in on educational institutions, including libraries, with well planned modes of action, only the most complacent educator/librarian will be unprepared, and they may not be complacent for long.

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